

Regarding the Ministry of Education's Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities" and How CELE Currently Addresses Specific Items

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OVERVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

At the core of the Action Plan are two main components: Globalization and Information Technology as well as developing critical thinking skills. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)'s English Website (<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm>) in the 2003/03/31 Press Release by Toyama Atsuko, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, these components are discussed. Some key phrases include:

- “Recently, globalization in various fields of the economy and society has advanced rapidly. Transfers of information and capital across national borders as well as the movement of people and products have increased... Given such circumstances, international understanding and cooperation are essential, as is the perspective of living as a member of the international society.” In other words: GLOBALIZATION.
- “...due to progress in the information technology revolution...there is a strong demand for the abilities to obtain and understand knowledge and information as well as the abilities to transmit information and to engage in communication.” In other words: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY.
- “At present...due to the lack of sufficient ability, many Japanese are restricted in their exchanges with foreigners and their ideas or opinions are not evaluated appropriately. It is also necessary for Japanese to develop their ability to clearly express their own opinions in Japanese first in order to learn English.” In other words: DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS.

In addition the Minister discusses the measures that will be carried out to achieve these goals.

- “These (measures) include improving teaching methods, improving the teaching ability of teachers, improving the selection system for school and university applicants as well as creating better curricula.

CELE’S FE GOALS AND OBJECTIVESⁱ

As the Freshman English (FE) program has students of a wide range of proficiency levels necessitating the use of a variety of textbooks according to class levels, it was determined about five or six years ago that CELE needed some means of ensuring a basic standard for the curricula of the program. The result was the creation of the CELE FE Goals and Objectives. The Objectives were revised about three years ago to ‘grade’ them according to what could be realistically achieved based on proficiency levels. The Goals themselves remained the same. They are:

Goal 1—Students will develop skills to adapt to FE classroom culture. Objectives for all levels refer to various aspects of the learner-centered instruction used in FE.

Goal 2—Students will improve their English communication skills. This goal is further broken-down into the four skills of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing with related objectives.

Goal 3—Students will improve their abilities to interact with people from other cultures.

Goal 4—Students will develop skills to express critical thinking in English.

ACTION PLAN

I. Goals to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”

English language abilities required for all Japanese people

English language skills required for specialized fields or for those active in international society

“On graduating from university, graduates can use English in their work”

The Action Plan discusses these goals:

- “With the progress of globalization, it is important...to acquire comprehensive communication abilities in ‘listening,’ ‘speaking,’ ‘reading,’ and ‘writing,’ from the

perspective of ‘English as a means of communication,’ in order to foster ‘Japanese with English Abilities.’”

II. Action to Improve English Education

Point 1: Improvement of English Classes

“Cultivating communication abilities through the repetition of activities making use of English”

- The majority of an English class will be conducted in English and many activities where students can communicate in English will be introduced.
- Small-group teaching and the streaming of students according to proficiency...

These are discussed in the Action Plan document:

- “In order to be able to ‘make use of English’, it is necessary not only to have a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to use English for the purpose of actual communication. Thus, in English classes, instruction mainly based on **grammar and translation** or **teacher-centered classes** are not recommended...making use of English as a means of communication, the learning of vocabulary and grammar should be enhanced, and communication abilities in listening,’ ‘speaking,’ ‘reading,’ and ‘writing’ should be fostered. Such techniques for instruction are necessary.” *Note: bolding and underlining done by the author of this paper for emphasis.*
- “To carry out such instruction effectively, it is important for teachers to establish many situations where students can communicate with each other in English and routinely to conduct (sic) classes principally in English...learners can experience the fulfillment of expressing themselves and understanding others, and feel the joy of learning English...it is also important to devise creative teaching methods so that learners can become interested in the importance and necessity of acquiring English, which can broaden the student’s world and possibilities.”
- “...small-group teaching and the streaming of students according to proficiency will be positively adopted. Measures such as the promotion of innovative English education and the dissemination of excellent classroom practices are required.”

HOW CELE CURRENTLY ADDRESSES THESE POINTS

It is important to note that all applicants for the position of Visiting Faculty Member (VFM) are required to have an M.A. in TESOL or Applied Linguistics or to have a Masters in a related field with a TESOL certificate. These programs require completion of training in current and past methodologies and approaches in Language Education. This means that CELE VFMs, for the most part, have knowledge and experience in implementing innovative methods and approaches to teaching languages into the classroom and the curriculum including learner-centered instruction that makes use of pair- and group-work activities.

In addition, CELE VFMs participate in various Professional Development (PD) activities both within Asia University and outside to keep abreast of current trends and issues in language teaching,

- Outside PD activities include: attendance at international conferences, presentations at international conferences and local Japanese Association of Language Teachers (JALT) chapter meetings, publications in Language Teaching publications, attendance at English Language book fairs, judging English Speech Contests at other institutions, etc.
- Inside PD activities include: once or twice a year inviting outside speakers to conduct workshops in areas related to current trends in language teaching, publishing in the CELE Journal, internal workshops such as OPI training, training in use of CLs and LLs, and use of CALL software and other computer related software, etc., ‘coffee hours’—presentations to share successful classroom activities, Project binders (write-ups of annual projects on subjects related to curriculum and syllabi development, classroom research and materials development, assessments, etc.).

Within the last four years, CELE has developed, implemented, and refined a two-phase system for the placement of students in the Freshman English Program. This placement system, which has been in used for the last three years, incorporates two different means to assess students’ English proficiency to ‘stream’ students into classes with others of similar proficiencies. The Freshman English Placement Test (FEPT) is used to assess listening and reading proficiencies and using the results the students are then placed into ‘interview groups’. Then Oral Proficiency Interviews are conducted and each student’s speaking proficiency is assessed based on CELE-adapted American Council on the Teaching

of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Guidelines. With the combined listening, reading, and speaking proficiency assessments, the students are placed into classes with students of similar abilities.

CELE VFMs use a variety of ‘creative teaching methods’ to address varied learning styles, and to foster in learners an interest in the ‘importance and necessity of acquiring English’. Some of these methods include: pair or group conversation tests, extensive reading activities, writing journals, writing paragraphs or essays or scripts or letters, presentations, role plays, peer editing of rough drafts, research on the internet, pen pals or key pals, use of video clips, use of realia, and use of computer and/or language labs.

The Action Plan includes a sub-heading under Section II, Point 1. Improvement of English classes. It is as follows:

- [Promotion of new course of Study]“...improvement of content is attempted by focusing on nurturing practical communication abilities. Deepening understanding of language and cultures, and a positive attitude toward communication is also stressed in foreign language education.”

This point is addressed in the **CELE** Culture goal (3) and is also an objective of Goal 1 for all levels which states: “Students will feel relaxed, positive and capable of learning English.”

Point 3: Improving motivation for learning English

- Opportunities to use English outside of the class will be enhanced.
- International exchange will be further developed through such means as communicating with the world using English.

These are discussed in the document as follows:

- “In order to cultivate students’ communication abilities in English, it is necessary to provide numerous experiences of using English as a means of communication.”
- “It is necessary to increase the motivation for learning English. Making use of various opportunities, education to deepen understanding of, and interest in, different cultures and ways of living will be promoted...it is important to employ approaches that are enjoyable for students and provide a sense of achievement in the use of English.

- [Promotion of education for international understanding] “Education for international understanding...aims at instilling a broader perspective and an understanding of different cultures, fostering attitudes of respect for such ideas, and the ability to live with people of different cultures.”

As discussed earlier, **CELE** has a culture goal (3) which all VFMs address within their classes. In addition, an objective for all levels under Goal 1 states: “Students will be aware that they can learn from their classmates.” Encouraging this objective can form the basis of ‘fostering attitudes of respect...’

The ‘creative teaching methods’ discussed on the previous page can also serve ‘to provide numerous experiences of using English as a means of communication’ as well as being ‘approaches that are enjoyable for students’. Such as encouraging reading of English graded readers or watching videos in English outside of class and having students write reports about them. In other words they can increase students’ motivation for learning English. In addition, CELE offers ‘English Hour’ four times a week, which is an opportunity for any student to drop in and use English. CELE also provides VFMs each week to assist with the ESS Club activities.

Point 6: Improvement of Japanese language abilities

- In order to cultivate communication abilities in English, the ability to express appropriately and understand accurately the Japanese language, which is the basis of all intellectual activities, will be fostered.

This is discussed in the document:

- “...in order to foster Japanese people rich in humanity with an awareness of society, who will live as members of an international society, it is important to enhance students’ thinking ability, foster students’ strength of expression and sense of language, deepen their interest in the Japanese language, and nurture an attitude of respect for the Japanese language.”
- “...emphasis has been placed on nurturing the ability to express appropriately and understand accurately the Japanese language in accordance with the purpose and situation for communication, and the person with whom one is speaking. The enhancement of

verbal ‘communication ability’ while respecting other people’s points of view and ways of thinking has been stressed.”

Of course, this point and related bullet points are focusing on the improvement of Japanese language abilities and not on English language abilities. However, it’s important to note that the **CELE** culture and critical thinking goals are addressing these same points in relation to English and as a result VFMs aim to promote these same points into their classes to varying degrees depending on the students’ proficiencies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one of the sub-headings under Point 1 is one that relates to teaching materials. It is discussed in the document as follows:

- “Promotion of innovation in textbooks and teaching materials. With textbooks and teaching materials, considerations should be given to the acquisition of language proficiency through the repetition of activities making actual use of English taking into consideration actual language situations and functions...that deal with appropriate materials for students in terms of their mental and physical developmental levels, and their interests.”

CELE VFMs take great care in selecting textbooks for their FE classes. Using knowledge about current trends and issues in Language Education, the CELE Goals and Objectives, student proficiencies, knowledge about English and language textbooks available, the VFMs in planning groups (those teaching approximately the same proficiencies) select the most appropriate textbooks and supplementary materials to address their students’ needs. It’s important to note that when a planning group finds a new textbook for potential use, VFMs will test it by piloting in the classroom for a few weeks. If all the VFMs in the planning group agree that it will serve their needs well, then a request to change textbooks is submitted to the Freshman English committee for final approval.

From all these points mentioned, it can be seen that CELE is already doing many of the points outlined in MEXT’s Action Plan. The next step is to think about ways we can improve our program even more as well as ways CELE can assist Asia University to improve its programs.

Reference

Toyama, A. (2003). *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2003/03/01 Press Release*.
[WWW document]. URL <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm>

End Note

ⁱ CELE's FE Goals and Objectives can be found in two locations: on Asia University's website in the Center for English Language Education pages or in the CELE Handbook.

Hart, J. (Site Designer). (2003). *FE Goals and Objectives*. [WWW document]. URL http://www.asia-u.ac.jp/english/cele/cele_curriculum.htm

Bess, D. (Ed.). (2003). Visiting Faculty Member's Handbook (2003 CELE Handbook). Unpublished, Center for English Language Education, Asia University. Tokyo. pp. 48-52